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ABSTRACT

The growth of adult higher education programs is in direct response to the demand in the marketplace for adult higher education. It is possible to deliver a high quality educational program in a nontraditional delivery format for the adult learner and to identify high quality educational programs in the marketplace. High quality adult educational programs have the following characteristics: (1) the program supports the mission of the institution; (2) support from both full-time faculty and administration exists; (3) the programs are guided by a sound administrative structure that provides for cross-campus involvement and appropriate staffing and services; (4) the faculty is a combination of full-time and adjunct individuals who possess the appropriate educational credentials and experience in the field; (5) the programs are reviewed and approved by one of six regional accrediting agencies; (6) curriculum is developed based upon adult learning theory and is continuously evaluated and improved; (7) it is clearly articulated what the student will learn as a result of completing the curriculum through the use of specific learning objectives and outcomes; (8) the adult learner has sufficient access to information required to conduct advanced research and study and become a lifelong learner; (9) student support services are provided which are accessible and user friendly; and (10) the institution is led by committed and competent leaders who provide vision to the institution. (Contains 15 references.) (YLB)

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BUILDING ON A TRADITION OF INNOVATION:

ENSURING QUALITY IN ADULT DEGREE PROGRAMS

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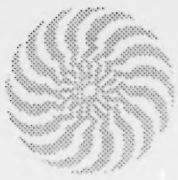

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INTRODUCTION

During the past 20 years, the demand for adult higher education has grown significantly. According to the 1987 *Digest of Educational Statistics*, enrollment of persons aged 25 and over increased 114 percent between 1970 and 1985, compared to an increase of only 15 percent for students aged 24 or less. Between 1980 and 1985, enrollment of the under 25 age group dropped by 5 percent, while enrollment of those 25 years and older increased by 12 percent. (*Digest of Educational Statistics*, 1987)

Programs which enable the adult learner to pursue higher education while maintaining employment have also increased, as noted in a recent CAEL/ACE white paper:

> Adult degree programs, including external degree programs and degree completion programs, and programs to assess the college-level learning acquired by adults in non-traditional collegiate settings, constitute some of the most promising innovations in higher education over the past 20 years. The last decade has seen a major acceleration in the initiation of these programs. In recent years, growth in the number of institutions with adult degree programs has been dramatic. In 1983, when ACE published a *Guide to External Degree Programs in the United States*, only 100 programs could be identified. The 1993 revised edition of this guide, entitled *Guide to Alternative and External Degree Programs in the United States*, will include 284 programs. This represents

nearly a threefold increase in less than a decade. (CAEL/ACE, 1993, p.1)

The growth of adult higher education programs is in direct response to the demand in the marketplace for adult higher education. This demand was documented in a 1988 study conducted for the College Board by Carol Aslanian and Henry Brickell. Aslanian and Brickell studied 1,000 adults enrolled in higher education; this study indicated that approximately one out of every 25 adults aged 25 and older studied for college credit in a given year. This represents a participation rate of 4.3 percent of all adults aged 25+ and equates to 6.2 million adults nationwide. A majority (59 percent) of the 1,000 adults studied were seeking degrees. Of this number, the Bachelor's degree had the highest representation (41 percent), followed by 28 percent seeking Master's degrees, 26 percent seeking Associate's degrees, and 5 percent seeking Doctorate's degrees. These data suggest that adults are serious degree seekers with specific goals and are not simply pursuing self-interest or personal growth courses or courses which are typically considered continuing education. Institutions which thoughtfully design degree completion programs, accept transfer credit in full, and allow adults to work toward degrees while remaining employed full time are meeting the majority of the market demands of the adult student.

Not surprisingly, many small private colleges which were dependent upon the "under 25"-aged student suffered enrollment losses as their traditional enrollment base eroded. In response to the increased higher education interest of the adult learner, growing numbers of small private colleges have dealt with the demographic shift in enrollment by offering programs which are sensitive to the needs of the working adult; weekend or one night a week study, credit for prior learning, and external degree programs offered within the community are common program formats. In fact, the increase in the numbers of adults pursuing higher education may actually be correlated to the increased number of adult-centered programs offered in response to the marketplace.

IDENTIFYING QUALITY ADULT HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

With the rapid growth of programs which respond to the adult learner's needs comes the possibility of poorly designed, poorly administered programs in the marketplace. How can the consumer distinguish the "good" from the "bad"? How can employers, who reimburse for tuition, ensure that their educational dollars are being wisely invested? How should *all* external degree programs, programs which offer credit for learning acquired outside of the classroom, accelerated programs, contracted programs, Saturday programs, lockstep programs, and other innovative educational delivery methods be evaluated? These are difficult questions which require complex, thoughtful responses. It is in the national interest to ensure that 6.2 million adults be enrolled in worthwhile programs which meet their educational needs. It is in everyone's best interest that the 25 percent of adults over the age of 25 enrolled in higher education are enrolled in high quality programs which result in quality educational outcomes.

During the past 20 years, the Institute for Professional Development (IPD) has accumulated significant experience within the field of innovative adult higher education programs. This experience has been gained during a time of massive societal changes which have impacted higher education appreciably:

> The American economy suffered and the United States became a debtor nation in the 1980s. The national debt climbed. The trade deficit increased. The value of the dollar declined in the world market. In the student body of the 1980s, the number of women

> surpassed male enrollment, and part-time students increased to over 40 percent of the total enrollment; over 40 percent of the total enrollment was above the traditional 18-24 college-going age. Now, more than ever, students began to think of themselves as consumers and demanded new services and programs. (Semrow, et al., 1992, p. 31)

IPD's experience has provided valuable insights into the reasons adults enroll in degree programs. Adults pursue higher education: (1) to fulfill a lifelong goal; (2) to improve their knowledge within their professional field; and (3) to help them advance in their careers. (Murphey, 1979) Adults are demanding consumers of higher education—they expect faculty to teach them new, relevant material which can be immediately applied in the workplace; they expect the classroom to be well lit, comfortable, and well equipped; they expect the college or university to provide answers to their questions promptly and accurately; they expect the learning experience to enrich their lives; and, most notable, they expect to be treated like adults. IPD's experience has shown that when these demands are *not* met, the adult learner will likely withdraw from the institution (at the very least) and more often than not, tell their colleagues of their unsatisfactory experience. Conversely, when these demands *are* met, adults persist despite the tremendous demands made on their time and personal resources, and they often become the best advertising an institution could have.

Do inferior adult education programs exist in the marketplace? The answer is yes, they surely do. As with most products whose quality is hard to measure, the good educational programs will experience growth and increased demand while the poorly developed educational programs tend to experience decline. When evaluating a higher education program for adults, the consumer should talk to other adults who have completed their degrees or who are enrolled in the program. Is the material learned relevant to the adult's experience? Does the academic rigor equal that found in more "traditional" academic programs as evidenced by attainment of comparable learning outcomes? Are the faculty able to effectively communicate new ideas and to facilitate adult learning? Is the institution responsive to the adult's questions and concerns? Does the institution allow credit for prior learning and if so, are CAEL standards followed? Is academic advising provided? What is the graduation/degree completion rate? Would the student recommend the program to someone else?

The programs which have been developed with the consulting assistance of IPD experience continual growth due to the high quality academic experience provided. What are the critical elements that characterize a high quality adult higher education program? The ACE/Alliance Principles of Good Practices provide excellent guidelines for evaluating quality programs and are

encompassed in the critical elements listed below. The critical elements to providing a high quality adult higher education program can be identified as:

1. **Mission Fit** – A carefully planned program which supports the mission of the institution and which, in turn, is supported by the faculty and administration.

2. **Administrative Structure** – An administrative structure which provides for cross-campus involvement in delivering the program and provides appropriate staffing and services.

3. **Faculty Involvement and Qualifications** – A faculty which is a combination of full-time and adjunct individuals who possess the appropriate educational credentials and experience in the field taught.

4. **Accreditation** – A program which has been reviewed and approved by one of the six national regional accrediting agencies.

5. **Curriculum** – A curriculum which is on the cutting edge of the discipline which takes into account the prior experiences of the adult learner and which is developed and continuously improved based upon student and faculty feedback and involvement.

6. **Learning Outcomes** – A program in which there are clearly articulated learning outcomes which measure specific program objectives and the learning objectives of the adult student.

7. **Library/Learning Resources** – A program in which there are adequate learning resources to support the adult learner's academic research.

8. **Student Services Support** – A program that provides student services which meet the needs of the adult learner and are accessible to the adult. This may include a well-designed process to assess the adult learner's education gained through experience.

9. **Committed and Competent Leadership** – Support of the program by the institution's President, Vice Presidents, and Board of Directors and commitment to the program as an important role and function of the institution.

As of the fall of 1993, the Institute for Professional Development works with 11 private liberal arts institutions that deliver programs which meet all of the nine quality components above. Each of these components are examined in further detail within this report.

Quality and Mission Fit

Implementing an adult degree program within a traditional liberal arts institution which is often affiliated with a religious denomination can be viewed by many as a change in the institution's mission. Therefore, it is very important that the colleges with which IPD chooses to work already embrace adult education through existing programs. The development of an additional adult-oriented degree program, often offered externally, is an extension of what the institution has already begun. Even so, the program must be carefully planned to ensure that the mission and values of the institution are embedded within the program's goals and objectives.

For example, the traditional liberal arts institution typically values a curriculum which includes very specific liberal arts requirements. These liberal arts requirements should be included in the programs designed for the adult learner; if a course in the humanities is required to graduate with a Bachelor's degree on campus, then a course in the humanities is required of the adult learner earning a Bachelor's degree through an external program.

Each college or university places emphasis on specific academic areas which are reflected in the curriculum offered to the adult learner. If a college feels that mathematical logic and reasoning are key to the success of its graduates, the adult program should contain courses which require this foundation. If a college places greater emphasis on the individual's ability to reach moral decisions and act in a Christian fashion, then the adult programs should contain courses which provide this foundation. Each individual college is unique, and each curriculum designed for the adult learner must also be unique to reflect the values of the institution awarding the degree. The courses which are included in the curriculum, the liberal arts requirements to graduate, and the program objectives and outcomes must reflect the mission of the institution.

The adult program cannot be "transplanted" into an institution as one would transplant an organ; it must be an outgrowth of the institution itself. The adult program must live and breathe the mission of the institution, and advance this mission in ways which the faculty, administration, and staff endorse. Change does not occur often or easily within higher education. (Chaffe and Tierny, 1988) An adult degree program which is taught in a different format represents a change if the institution has not even embraced adult programming. However, when the institution's mission already encompasses the adult learner, change is seen as change to an existing entity rather than creation of a new, foreign object. Under the circumstances already described above, subtle changes are accepted and incorporated into the institution's ongoing mission. Under the proper conditions, an adult program can be designed and developed which enhances an institution's mission and which is fully supported by the full-time faculty and administration. The

Institute for Professional Development exercises extreme care to ensure that the proper conditions and climates exist for the support and development of an adult degree program.

Quality and Administrative Structure

Adult degree programs require a sound administrative structure which is supported by adequate resources to provide a quality educational experience for the adult. The Institute for Professional Development has had the opportunity to observe a variety of administrative structures over the past two decades. Based upon this experience, it is evident that quality programs require strong leadership that will provide program visibility and integration with the traditional administrative structure of the university. Major academic decisions rest with the faculty and the administrative cabinet, with the day-to-day activities carried out by a Program Dean or Director. Although specific titles may vary, in the most effective administrative structures, the Adult Program Director reports to the Vice President of Academic Affairs, who reports directly to the President of the institution.

The Vice President of Academic Affairs must be knowledgeable about all aspects of the adult program and should recognize the services which must be provided by the traditional, on-campus departments: financial aid, admissions, human resources, accounting, library, information systems, and book store. The adult program itself is a consumer of these on-campus services; it does not operate in a vacuum or totally independent of the campus. In addition, faculty services from a variety of departments will be called upon to develop curriculum, review policy and procedure, and teach. The Vice President of Academic Affairs is in an ideal position to coordinate the various services needed for the adult program to operate effectively.

An external adult degree program will experience difficulties if the decision-making process fails to follow traditional academic channels. For example, if all new courses require academic review and approval from a committee on campus, any course developed for the adult program should follow the approval process. If a change in admission requirements or graduation requirements must be approved via committee, then any such change should be directed to the appropriate committee. While this process can take several months, decisions which are made outside of the normal process may be subject to skepticism and doubt. The Program Director must continuously inform and involve all appropriate staff and faculty of the institution regardless of the time required to do so. The institutions with which the Institute for Professional Development work have successfully developed administrative structures to ensure that programs are integrated into the traditional framework of the institution.

Quality and Faculty Involvement

Involvement of Full-Time Faculty

Without question, the faculty of the institution must be involved in the decision to implement an adult degree program. The Institute for Professional Development, in its role as a consultant, typically spends one to three years discussing potential programs and mission fit with faculty and administration before a final decision is reached to develop an adult degree program. Faculty are invited to visit other colleges and universities that have implemented adult programs, and to ask hard questions of the faculty who have been down the road before them. In some cases, a panel of academic administrators from institutions with adult programs may be brought before a group of faculty and staff to answer questions. A full faculty vote affirming the decision to develop an adult degree program is most often required before IPD provides additional consulting services. In no case is a program developed, implemented, or administered because the President or the Board wishes to contract with an outside agency to adopt a "ready-made" or "prepackaged" adult degree program without significant consultation with the institution's faculty. (ACE/CAEL, 1993, p. 19) IPD actively involves faculty and works toward faculty acceptance of the adult programs irrespective of the length of the process.

Training Full-Time Faculty

Faculty who teach full time within a private liberal arts institution are committed to teaching first and foremost. Teaching the adult student, however, often provides new and different challenges. Many of the faculty members with whom IPD works have taught the adult student in the traditional classroom or through the existing continuing education department of the college. Many other faculty members, however, have had little experience teaching the adult learner or developing course material based upon adult learning theory. Prior to teaching in the adult program or prior to developing course material, an institution's full-time faculty are encouraged to attend workshops provided by IPD in which adult learning theory is discussed, the use of learning outcomes to measure progress is examined, and developing curriculum for use with the adult student is reviewed.

In addition, full-time faculty are invited to attend a Faculty Assessment, which is an objective process developed by IPD to identify adjunct faculty who understand academic content and facilitation of learning. By attending a Faculty Assessment, full-time faculty become better informed about the selection process and more enlightened about the adjunct's role in the classroom and campus environment. Ongoing Faculty Assessment participation as faculty

evaluators is also encouraged and is an effective method of involving the full-time faculty in the selection of adjunct faculty members.

Additional faculty training is provided by IPD when the college chooses to implement a Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) program. Prior learning assessment is the process by which an adult may have learning outcomes acquired outside of a classroom evaluated by a faculty member for equivalent college credit. Traditional faculty initially may be highly skeptical of awarding college credit for learning acquired outside of the classroom. Therefore, several workshops may be conducted to explain the process and the faculty member's role, with one or more training workshops devoted to evaluation of learning using the CAEL standards.

Ongoing training and development of faculty members who teach the adult learner is a key component to ongoing quality improvement. IPD sponsors faculty development in a variety of areas, including evaluation and grading of the adult student, facilitation techniques for instructional delivery, and peer evaluation of classroom performance. IPD also sponsors research efforts of its associated colleges and universities to further faculty growth and development.

Quality and Adjunct Faculty

The use of adjunct faculty has long been a practice of higher education. The nation's community colleges, which are *teaching* institutions, employ large numbers of adjunct faculty. The utilization of adjunct faculty members draws both criticism and praise as cited by Gappa and Leslie upon conclusion of qualitative research conducted at 18 colleges and universities:

> We found that part-time faculty vary widely in their teaching performance, but we found little to suggest that they are the root of any systemic decline in the quality of higher education. To the contrary, we also found that part-time faculty are, for the most part, superbly qualified for their teaching assignments, highly committed, and conscientious about doing their jobs. (Gappa and Leslie, p. 6)

Adjuncts, who typically are employed outside of a higher education academic environment (usually in business and industry or secondary education) bring a welcome "real world" perspective to the classroom. Adult students surveyed by IPD-associated institutions frequently describe adjunct faculty members as *caring, honest, available, challenging, great, and excellent*. The following student comments reflect the value of the adjunct faculty member:

> "Dave" is excellent at providing realistic, thought-provoking discussion. I appreciate his honesty and repeated comments of encouragement. He is a committed professional."
>
> "Bob" was great. He was so positive on the Baker experience. He made me feel special being a[n] SPGS student. He was knowledgeable and fun."
>
> (taken from Baker University, End-of-Course Survey)

Adjunct Faculty Qualifications

The qualifications for employment of adjunct faculty are determined by each regional accrediting association. The majority of the institutions with which IPD works are accredited by either the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools or the North Central Association. Within these accrediting associations, the academic requirements for employment of adjunct faculty are no different than the academic requirements for full-time faculty. As stated in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools *Criteria for Accreditation*:

> The number of full-time faculty members must be adequate to provide effective teaching, advising, and scholarly or creative activity, as well as appropriate to participate in curriculum development, policy making, and institutional planning and governance. The employment of part-time faculty members, however, can provide expertise to enhance the educational effectiveness of an institution but the number of part-time faculty members must be properly controlled. Part-time faculty members teaching courses for credit must meet the same requirements for professional, experiential, and scholarly preparation as their full-time counterparts teaching in the same disciplines. Each institution must also provide for appropriate orientation, supervision, and evaluation of all part-time faculty members. Students taught by part-time faculty members must have access to them for purposes of academic assistance; therefore, procedures to ensure access must be clearly stated and made known. (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 1991, p. 28)

To teach at the undergraduate level, a minimum degree of Master's is required within the field taught. To teach at the graduate level, a minimum

degree of an earned Doctorate or a combination of experience and a Master's degree (i.e., MBA and CPA designation) is required. In addition to the academic qualifications, the adjunct faculty member brings current knowledge and practice in his or her field—a critical element when offering instruction to the adult who seeks practical application of learning.

Orientation, Supervision, and Evaluation of Faculty

Faculty orientation, supervision, and evaluation is an extremely important component of adult higher education programming. The adult consumer of higher education is, almost without exception, more demanding than the 18- to 22-year-old student. Adults are not afraid to question and challenge existing theory, and to stretch faculty beyond the norm as they immediately test and apply the theory learned in the classroom to their workplace.

The institutions with which IPD works have developed, with IPD's consultation, faculty orientations which begin with the interview process (described earlier as Faculty Assessments) and continue after appointment by the institution via meetings with the program director, review of faculty handbooks, classroom observation, and new faculty orientation workshops.

In addition, the use of a Peer Mentoring Process is commonly used among the IPD-related institutions. Peer mentoring allows time for the new faculty member (adjunct or full-time) to understudy with an experienced faculty member. Prior to teaching a class on his or her own, the new faculty member will observe the experienced faculty member in the classroom. After observing a number of class sessions, the new faculty member is better prepared to step into his or her own classroom. Mentoring continues for as long as it is needed, with the experienced faculty member providing guidance and assistance when requested, and visiting the new faculty member's classroom to observe teaching methods and to offer suggestions and encouragement. Administrative visits are conducted regularly to provide evaluation and feedback to faculty members, and End-of-Course Surveys completed by all students are analyzed to identify faculty strengths and weaknesses. End-of-Course Surveys provide the basis for ongoing faculty development and training.

The use of End-of-Course Surveys is part of a larger *Academic Quality Management System* used at each IPD-associated institution to evaluate, on a continuous basis, the quality of instruction, administrative services, student recruitment, student services, and learning outcomes of students. The *Academic Quality Management System* utilizes a variety of survey instruments which may include: (1) a registration survey which collects demographic and affective information about each student; (2) student End-of-Course Surveys for the course taken; (3) faculty End-of-Course Surveys which evaluate the curriculum and college surveys; (4) graduation surveys; and (5) post-graduation surveys.

The information collected via the *Academic Quality Management System* enables the institution to continuously improve its procedures, policies, services, and instruction. All of these instruments are available through IPD.

Another evaluation and feedback method employed by IPD-associated institutions is the use of a "student representative" system. The student representative is a class member, elected by his/her class, to serve as a liaison between the classroom and the college. The student representative is responsible for reporting problems with a faculty member, problems with the classroom environment (i.e., hot, poor lighting), distributing college information such as newsletters or bulletins, and for ensuring that the End-of-Course Surveys are completed in confidence and returned to the college directly. Periodic Student Representative Meetings are held at each institution to provide a forum for feedback from the students' perspectives and to show appreciation for the service they provide.

Orientation, supervision, and evaluation of faculty (full-time or part-time adjunct) are areas which are all too often neglected within the traditional higher education system. It is critical to the success of adult degree programs, however, and can ensure that quality instruction occurs in the classroom, regardless of where the classroom is located. The multi-faceted approach of faculty assessment, orientation and training, peer mentoring, peer evaluation, student evaluation, and utilization of student representatives is one which the Institute for Professional Development finds highly effective in maintaining quality in the classroom. The use of the *Academic Quality Management System* goes even further than evaluating quality in the classroom; *AQMS* evaluates the entire educational process experienced by the adult student.

Quality and Accreditation

After 20 years of experience in adult higher education, IPD has had the opportunity to work with institutions in 16 different states and four of the six regional accrediting associations. In IPD's 20 years of experience, it has never been possible to operate a new adult degree completion program without, at a minimum, regional accreditation review and, in most instances, a review by the appropriate state agency.

Each of the adult degree programs which have been implemented with the consulting services of the Institute for Professional Development has been successfully scrutinized, reviewed, and evaluated by the institution's regional accrediting association and has met individual state boards of higher education requirements. This is no easy task. Mission fit, program design, faculty qualifications, administrative structure, learning resources, measurable learning outcomes, financial condition, market needs analysis, and student support

services are subjected to careful scrutiny and review by regional accreditation site visit team members and to state boards' staff review. The adult degree completion programs are continuously reviewed and reaccredited, often with superlative comments from the review team members. An example of this is found in the 1989 Report of the Reaffirmation Committee of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools following their review of an IPD-associated college:

> The institution is to be commended on its efforts to ensure program quality and effectiveness which are evaluated on an on-going basis through a mechanism known as the Quality Control System. The two components of this system are an outcomes review and an academic accounting system consisting of seven different survey instruments. Regularly scheduled meetings of student representatives with faculty and administrators provide additional feedback on program quality and serve as a valuable forum for identification and resolution of problems. (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 1989)

The report continues to discuss the quality of the faculty employed in the adult degree completion program:

> The program has a pool of highly dedicated, enthusiastic, competent faculty and prospective faculty from which teachers are selected for the associate degree program. They are all committed to the concept and format of the program. Persons are chosen through a carefully structured process which is set forth in the faculty handbook. (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 1989)

Superlative comments from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools are given only after a comprehensive evaluation has been conducted. While the comments cited above are based upon only one college visitation, similar comments may be found in the accreditation reviews of all 11 associated institutions.

When the critical elements of mission fit, academic approval by all appropriate bodies, administrative structure, faculty qualifications, library resources, and fiscal resources are attended to, the adult degree programs meet or exceed the standards for approval.

Quality and Curriculum

A quality adult degree program should include a curriculum which takes into account the prior experiences of the adult learner and which is developed and continuously improved based upon faculty feedback and involvement.

Curriculum Design

According to adult learning theory, one of the major differences between an adult and the traditional-age student is that an adult is more "self-directed." An adult has a greater number of experiences to draw upon in a learning situation, and generally engages in learning not because it is compulsory but because he/she has a genuine desire to learn. The mature individual finds greater value in learning that which may be applied immediately, and learning shifts from being subject-centered to being performance-centered. A predominant element to successful adult programs is an institution's recognition that adult students bring richness of skills, knowledge, and learning aptitudes to the institutions where they choose to complete their education. If the college program and its individual teachers can tap into this wealth of experience, expertise, and readiness for learning, remarkable and exciting changes can transform both the student and the teacher. (Gilbert-Levin, LoSardo, Ryan, 1990)

The Institute for Professional Development has assisted colleges and universities in the design of curriculum which recognizes the adult learner's needs. Courses of instruction utilize a collaborative learning model which places the learner in an active rather than a passive role. Study groups of between four and five students meet throughout the course to complete group assignments. The study group process, when designed into curriculum, allows the adult learner to share his/her own experience within a small group setting; to develop group communication skills; to strengthen teamwork skills; and to develop a strong peer group support structure. The study group process most closely resembles the way in which people work together in the "real world."

The curriculum designed for the adult must actively engage the individual in the learning process and tap into the rich reservoir of experience. IPD assists colleges in designing curricula which provide for the active engagement of the adult through case study, projects, role playing, simulations, debates, small group discussions, and frequent individual and group classroom presentations. Faculty members who teach the adult learner are trained as "facilitators" rather than lecturers; by facilitating learning, a faculty member draws upon the experience of the adult student, relates the experience to academic theory and content, and thereby allows the adult to contribute to the educational process.

Program Design

The method by which instruction is delivered to the adult is critical to the adult's decision to enroll. Not surprisingly, an overwhelming majority (71 percent) of the adult students surveyed by Aslanian and Brickell work full time, and 12 percent work part time. (Aslanian and Brickell, 1988) In fact, 60 percent of students included in a study by the National Center for Educational Statistics in 1981 reported their main reason for taking course work as job related. Of this 60 percent, 74 percent of the students taking course work for job-related reasons did so to improve or advance in their current job. (Kay, 1981) When designing adult higher education programs, it is critical to keep the needs of the adult learner in mind.

- The adult has limited time to devote to the pursuit of higher education, and has competing responsibilities of family, job, and social commitments. The delivery of instruction must be accessible and dependable. In fact, adults cite "convenient location" as having the most importance when choosing a college (70 percent of adults studied by Aslanian and Brickell selected this as first or second in importance).

- The program content must take into account why the adult chooses to return to college in the first place—job relevance. To overlook this motivating factor in program and curriculum design is a serious injustice to the adult student.

Because accessibility, efficient use of time, and job relevance are important motivators for the adult to pursue higher education, the programs which are developed in collaboration with the Institute for Professional Development are carefully planned to take these factors into consideration.

Each program is designed to reflect the values of the institution and the needs of the adults being served. The most efficient way to meet the needs of the adult student is through a carefully sequenced curriculum (occasionally referred to as "lockstep" programming). If a program is being developed in the area of business administration or nursing, for example, the core curriculum requirements are identified and placed in the most appropriate sequence to allow the adult students to accumulate knowledge, build upon that knowledge while in the program, and academically grow as they progress through increasingly difficult material.

In the programs, the adult student progresses through the curriculum one course at a time, enabling him/her to immerse him/herself in one subject and one subject only. Learning groups (cohorts) of between 15 and 22 students begin the program at the same time, and remain in the same cohort throughout the program. The program sequence ensures that the student has the

foundation necessary for the course; for example, students who enroll in a business research course will have completed a core course in statistical methods. The faculty member teaching business research knows how each student has been academically prepared prior to beginning the business research course.

A sequenced curriculum also enables an institution to integrate specific learning objectives throughout the curriculum. In one case, an IPD-associated university which developed a Master of Business Administration program felt that values and ethics should be incorporated across the curriculum. As each course was developed, the course developer was required to identify case studies and exercises to demonstrate the applications of values and ethics in the workplace. In another case, a college wanted to integrate computer applications and a global focus into the curriculum. Again, each course was designed to include computer applications, readings, and assignments related to global issues.

Because accessibility and reliability are important in the adult's decision to enroll in higher education, IPD-associated programs typically provide the adult student with a calendar showing when each course will begin and end for *the entire program.* The program format typically calls for one night of classroom instruction per week. The class location and day of the week which the adult attends remain constant for the duration of the program. This design takes the uncertainty out of the higher education experience. The adult knows what is going to be offered, and when it is going to be offered, prior to the beginning of the program. Because the courses are not offered on a semester basis but on a continuously scheduled basis, the adult student does not have to rearrange his or her life every semester to accommodate college. Nor do the adults need to worry about getting a required course when it is needed, or about having a class for which they are registered canceled due to low enrollment that semester.

Continuous Improvement of Curriculum

Through the utilization of the *Academic Quality Management System,* IPD-associated colleges and universities receive constant feedback about the quality of the instruction and the curriculum delivered in the classroom. The results of the End-of-Course Surveys completed by both students and faculty are tabulated and reviewed to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses. Based upon that feedback from the classroom, courses are updated and revised at least once every two years. Publishers frequently issue new editions of textbooks, which also necessitates revision of the curriculum.

Unlike many traditional classrooms, the material presented to the adult learner is kept current and relevant to today's society. Even courses offered in the liberal arts areas, such as Literature of the Western World or Music

Appreciation, are designed with the adult student in mind and include study group activities, field trips, and current application of theory. One would not likely find a 10-year-old course syllabus in an adult program. Curriculum must be kept current if it is to serve as a valuable educational experience for the adult learner. In the IPD-associated institutions, quality curriculum is not a goal, it is a reality.

Quality and Learning Outcomes

During the mid-to-late 1980s, learning outcomes measurement became a major theme among higher education. Never before has higher education come under such public scrutiny. We have seen an increase in the public's demand that higher education be held accountable, creating a greater need to measure and report student success. Public support, in terms of financing, has also declined. Growing numbers of state systems faced serious budget declines averaging 3.9 percent in fiscal year 1990-1991. (Cage, 1991)

Since the early 1970s, the Institute for Professional Development has promulgated the use of outcomes-based curriculum. There are two critical components to every course offered through the IPD-associated institution's adult programs: (1) clearly stated learning objectives for each course, and (2) clearly stated learning outcomes for each course. The following material is taken from the Institute for Professional Development *Guidelines for Curriculum Module Development* (1991):

> ***Overall Course Objectives***
>
> The overall course objectives communicate to students what the intended results of instruction should be; they answer the question, "What will the student be able to do as a result of taking this course?" They delineate the content and direct students and faculty toward specific issues. The course objectives provide the parameters for the course outcomes and subordinate workshop objectives. Further, they guide not only the course development process, but also the teaching/learning process. Objectives must be **measurable.** (Institute for Professional Development, 1991. p. 10)
>
> ***Overall Course Learning Outcomes or Competencies***
>
> Very simply, an educational objective describes the learning a student will acquire; an educational outcome prescribes the manner in which the student will demonstrate that he or she has acquired the learning.

> Course outcomes provide a mechanism for evaluating a student's progress and mastery of course material. Outcomes verify the course objectives. They are demonstrations of learning that are drawn out through assignments, activities, and exams. They also provide for reinforcement of the key concepts to be learned in the course. (Institute for Professional Development, 1991, p. 13)

This 20-year focus on the use of specific measurable learning objectives and accompanying outcome measurements has placed the Institute for Professional Development ahead of its time. The challenge now facing adult programs is comparability of learning acquired in a "traditional" delivery format to learning acquired in a "nontraditional" delivery format. The nontraditional adult student has been studied, tracked, and analyzed to a far greater extent than has the traditional student. The current challenge is to measure the learning acquired by traditional instructional methods and to compare this to the nontraditional instructional methods. Many of the IPD-associated colleges are considering using nationally normed exams which can be given to both groups of students. Several others are considering using pretests and post-tests to measure academic gains over time. Based upon the information previously gathered about their adult students and the clearly measurable gains in student progress upon completion of the programs, the institutions with which IPD consults have reason to be confident that a comparison of traditional learning to nontraditional learning outcomes will be favorable to the nontraditional adult program.

Quality and Learning Resources

Whenever an adult-centered program is offered off campus, consideration must be given to the student's access to library information. Quality research cannot be conducted without access to quality learning resources. Each IPD-associated institution requires the adult student to complete major research projects and writing assignments which necessitate the use of library resources.

How can this be accomplished when a classroom site is 100 miles from the main campus? The colleges and universities with which IPD consults have, with IPD's guidance, developed a variety of solutions. First and foremost, the institution's librarian must be involved in identifying appropriate learning resources in the area being served. Inter-library loan agreements are secured; Learning Resource Manuals are prepared for students which explain how and where they may access information; students may request an on-line literature search from the main campus by faxing in their written search requests; use of modems to access library data may be utilized; use of the library instruction is included in the first course of each student's program.

In today's information-oriented society, an adult's ability to access existing information is as important as it is to acquire new information. Programs designed for adults go beyond simply helping them locate material to write a research paper. They strive to educate the student in locating and retrieving information from a variety of sources, via electronic and manual means, to become lifelong learners.

Quality and Student Services Support

Student Services

A quality adult higher education program must provide student services which meet the needs of the adult learner and are accessible to the student. As has been indicated throughout this paper, adults have limited time which they value highly. If a bookstore is open only during the daytime, the adult must take time off work to buy necessary textbooks. If registration is conducted only during the day, with no evening or weekend availability, the adult must again take time off work. If the offices of financial aid, the registrar, counseling, and accounting are open only during the week from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., the adult must take time off work to attend to college business. If an institution views the student as an intrusion rather than a customer, the adult will quickly experience frustration and dissatisfaction.

The Institute for Professional Development has recommended numerous "Student Friendly" services for the adult learner, which may be found in various forms at each of the 11 institutions with which IPD consults. Briefly, these are discussed below:

- **Student Advisement** – Adult students typically enter college with a variety of previous college course work which must be evaluated and transferred, then communicated to the student. Student advisement occurs either individually, with the student meeting with an advisor who is very familiar with the student's academic background and educational goals, or in some institutions, in a group advisement session in which transfer credit is explained and degree completion options are discussed. Both methods serve to clarify for the adult what credit has transferred, what requirements have been met, and what requirements will need to be met in order to fulfill degree requirements. Students are able to develop degree completion plans, which may include the plan to complete a Prior Learning Assessment process or to complete additional course work at the institution or at a community college. When instruction is offered at a distance

from the main campus, the student advisors travel to a meeting site convenient for the adult.

- **Textbook and Material Delivery** – Textbooks and materials are delivered to the student at the classroom, wherever that classroom might be, in sufficient time to prepare for the next course of the program. The adult student is not required to take time off work, drive to the bookstore, park, and purchase books and materials.

- **Registration and Payment of Tuition and Fees** – Initial registration and payment of tuition and fees occur at the class location. A university representative drives to the class location and provides this service to the student. Consumer sensitive payment plans accommodate the adult student through a variety of approaches: payment plans structured to correspond to tuition reimbursement; credit card payment options; coupon booklets can be provided; phone-in or mail-in payments may be accepted.

- **Financial Aid Processing** – Because financial aid tends to be confusing and complicated for the adult, each institution employs a financial aid specialist who works specifically with the adult students.

Empirical evidence supports that adult-centered student services enable the adult learner to focus on what is most important: advancing his or her education. In addition, the institution must focus on developing adult-friendly policies and procedures. Transfer credit policies must be clearly communicated and consistently applied; withdrawal and refund policies must be fair and clearly articulated; grading policies and student performance expectations must be clearly communicated by each faculty member, with a grievance policy outlined in a well written Student Handbook. The Institute for Professional Development works closely with each institution to identify potential student policies based upon IPD's past experience of working with adult students.

Credit for Prior Learning

The Institute for Professional Development has provided consulting assistance to over 20 institutions who wished to implement Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) processes. Throughout our consulting history, the recommendations of the Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning (now the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning) and the American Council on Education have been followed in the implementation of PLA programs. Faculty members at each institution have been involved in orientation and training, and college staff members have been provided with administrative consulting services. Periodic program evaluations have been conducted by IPD at the college's request to ensure that CAEL and ACE

standards are applied. As a result, institutions with Prior Learning Assessment programs which have been developed with IPD's assistance are among the best in the United States.

Quality student services must be provided to the adult learner if a program is to succeed and grow. Through careful planning, staffing, and organization of services, this quality is evident throughout the 11 institutions with which IPD works.

Quality and Committed and Competent Leadership

It is evident that a quality higher education program requires extremely competent, committed leadership. The delivery of innovative programs in a different format requires a vision of what could be and the ability to make that vision a reality. There are many obstacles which may have been discussed in this paper: the institution must view the adult program as an extension of its mission; the faculty must understand and support the program; the administrative structure must be flexible to provide adequate staffing of the program; appropriate faculty must be identified and developed to teach in the program; accreditation issues must be addressed thoroughly; curriculum must be developed which utilizes an adult learning theory approach; learning outcomes must be incorporated; learning resources for distance education sites must be identified and maintained; and student services support must be responsive to the adult's schedule and time demands.

The Institute for Professional Development has been fortunate to work with visionary college and university presidents, vice presidents, and deans who focus on how their institution can better serve the needs of the adult student. These individuals recognize that society is changing and are not afraid to change their infrastructure to accommodate this changing society. IPD has been fortunate to work with individuals who build consensus and support for adult higher education: individuals who are, themselves, lifelong learners. It is only through the competent leadership provided by each institution's president, vice president, and deans that programs which are viewed as innovative or nontraditional can be conceived and nurtured and grow into some of the nation's highest quality adult higher education programs. The Institute for Professional Development is proud of our association with each of the institutions now delivering quality adult education to a growing segment of society.

CONCLUSION

The growth of adult higher education programs is in direct response to the demand in the marketplace for adult higher education. It is possible to deliver a quality educational program in a nontraditional delivery format for the adult learner. It is also possible to identify quality educational programs in the marketplace. Quality adult educational programs ensure:

- That the program supports the mission of the institution.
- That support from both full-time faculty and administration exists.
- That the programs are guided by a sound administrative structure which provides for cross-campus involvement and appropriate staffing and services.
- That the faculty body is a combination of full-time and adjunct individuals who possess the appropriate educational credentials and experience in the field taught, combined with a sense of commitment to the adult learner's educational needs.
- That the programs are reviewed and approved by one of six regional accrediting agencies.
- That curriculum is developed based upon adult learning theory and is continuously evaluated and improved.

- That it is clearly articulated what the student will learn as a result of completing the curriculum through the use of specific learning objectives and outcomes.

- That the adult learner has sufficient access to information required to conduct advanced research and study and to become a lifelong learner.

- That student support services are provided which are accessible and "user friendly."

- That the institution is led by committed and competent leaders who provide vision to the institution.

The Institute for Professional Development can and does assist colleges and universities to develop high quality, adult-oriented educational programs. As a consulting corporation, it is committed to its primary mission:

> *The primary mission of IPD is to assist accredited private colleges and universities in expanding and diversifying their academic offerings and student population base through the development of quality academic degree programs designed to meet the educational needs of working adults.*

By remaining true to its mission, the Institute for Professional Development has assisted over 20 private colleges and universities during the past two decades to develop quality academic programs, serving over 50,000 adult students nationwide.

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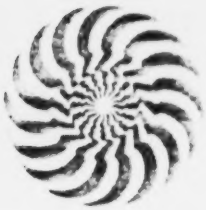

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